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Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 PM-05 /028 R

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 014939

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR TS

SUBJECT: SOVIET USE OF MENZEL-BOURGUIBA DOCKYARDS INTUNISIA
REF: A. TUNIS 7793 (DTG 311019Z OCT 77)
B. TUNIS 8128 (DTG 11634Z NOV 77) C. STATE 8286

FOLLOWING CABLE (STATE 295497) BEING REPEATED FYI AS PER
REF C:

1. WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF DISCUS-
SIONS REPORTED REFTELS A AND B. IN PARTICULAR, WE DO NOT
WISH TO GIVE TUNISIANS THE IMPRESSION THAT WE NO LONGER
ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR DECISION TO ALLOW MEDITERRANEAN
SQUADRON TO USE REPAIR FACILITIES AT MENZEL-BOURGUIBA. IT
IS IMPORTANT, THEREFORE, THAT WE TAKE NO ACTION NOW THAT
COULD BE INTERPRETED BY THE TUNISIANS AS "LEGITIMATIZING"
THEIR DEAL WITH THE SOVIETS.

2. OUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IS TO BRING ABOUT THE TERMINATION
OF SOVIET USE OF THE YARD. ALTHOUGH THIS MAY BE UNLIKELY
SOON, WE WANT TO KEEP PRESSURE ON THE TUNISIANS TO AT LEAST
HOLD SOVIET USE TO AN ABSOLUTE MINIMUM. WE DO NOT BELIEVE
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THE SIXTH FLEET IS IN A POSITION TO OFFER SUFFICIENT
BUSINESS TO "COMPETE" WITH THE SOVIETS, AND EVEN IF THE
CAPABILITY OF THE YARD WERE SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED. THE

PROBLEM JUST WOULD BE RAISED TO A HIGHER MAGNITUDE OF
BUSINESS. SIXTH FLEET USE WOULD REMAIN MARGINAL IN TERMS

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OF SIXTH FLEET REQUIREMENTS AND PROBABLY IN TERMS OF COMMERCIAL BENEFIT TO TUNISIA. THE NET RESULT OF ANY U.S. EFFORT AT THIS TIME TO QUOTE BALANCE UNQUOTE THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS TUNISIA GAINS FROM SOVIET USE COULD BE TO ALLOW TUNISIANS TO CLAIM THEY WERE BEING "EVEN HANDED" AND THEREBY WIGGLE OFF THE HOOK. HOWEVER, WE RECOGNIZE THAT AT SOME FUTURE DATE IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO CONSIDER SOME OCCASIONAL USE OF THE SHIPYARD BY THE SIXTH FLEET.

3. IN THIS CONNECTION THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS HAS RECEIVED THE REPORT OF THE INITIAL SURVEY OF THE YARD BY CAPTAIN CLINT TAYLOR. HE REPORTED THAT THE SIXTHFLT CAN USE THE FACILITY, BUT WILL HAVE TO WORK WITHIN LIMITED TUNISIAN CAPABILITIES UNTIL SOME INDUSTRIAL CAPACITY IS ESTABLISHED. HE ALSO SAID THAT HE HAD AGREED VERBALLY WITH THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE SHIPYARD, MR. DOUIK, THAT A SHIP WOULD BE REPAIRED IN THE YARD ABOUT 20 JANUARY TO 05 FEBRUARY 78 AND THAT A TEAM OF ABOUT FIVE SURVEYORS WOULD VISIT THE YARD THE WEEK OF 21 NOVEMBER WITH A WORK PACKAGE FOR THE SHIP. CAPTAIN TAYLOR NOTED THAT AFTER THE FOLLOW-ON SURVEY A CONTRACT WOULD HAVE TO BE NEGOTIA-TED FOR AWARD BY 10 DECEMBER.

4. AMBASSADOR SHOULD TAKE EARLY OCCASION TO DISCUSS AGAIN WITH APPROPRIATE GOT SENIOR OFFICIALS SUBJECT OF SOVIET USE, AND U.S. DESIRE THAT THEY TERMINATE SUCH USE. IN

THIS RESPECT, WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO LET THE TUNISIANS KNOW OF RECENT CONCERN EXPRESSED WITHIN NATO THAT APPARENT AGREEMENT WITH THE SOVIETS RE MENZEL-BOURGUIBA SIGNALS A SHIFT IN ORIENTATION OF TUNISIAN FOREIGN POLICY (THIS WAS ASSERTION IN NATO STAFF DOCUMENT WHICH WE HAVE SUGGESTED BE CHANGED). YOU SHOULD EMPHASIZE POINT THAT SOVIET USE OF TUNISIAN REPAIR FACILITIES RUNS REAL RISK OF TARNISHING TUNISIA'S IMAGE AMONG ITS FRIENDS IN CONGRESS. WHO ARE SENSITIVE TO ACTIONS WHICH WOULD INCREASE OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES OF SOVIET MEDITERRANEAN SQUADRON.

5. CONCERNING THE IMPLIED COMMITMENT TO THE TUNISIANS TO MAKE TRIAL USE OF THE YARD. AMBASSADOR SHOULD SEE THAT APPROPRIATE TUNISIAN OFFICIALS ARE INFORMED THAT THE U.S. HAS DETERMINED AFTER FURTHER STUDY OF NEEDS THAT FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE THERE IS NO REQUIREMENT TO DO SO. IN EXPLAINING WHY THE SURVEYORS HAVE NOT VISITED YARD AND NO SHIP REPAIRS WILL BE SCHEDULED AT THIS TIME, APPRECIA-TION SHOULD BE EXPRESSED FOR THE FORTHCOMING MANNER IN WHICH THE TENTATIVE PLANS WERE COORDINATED. CHRISTOPHER

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